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SUBJECT: DEFMIN MORIN ON HIS TRIP TO THE U.S., AFGHANISTAN,
EUROPEAN DEFENSE AND THE DEFENSE WHITE PAPER

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Mark A. Pekala, for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. On January 16, the Ambassador met with Defense Minister Herve Morin to discuss Morin's upcoming trip to the United States. Morin offered views on the situation in Afghanistan and strongly advocated the French strategy of strengthening European defense capabilities "along side NATO." Morin also predicted that the ongoing defense and security "white paper" would result in serious internal reform at the MOD, as well as cause a territorial reorganization of French forces. End Summary.

A SELF-PROCLAIMED FAN OF AMERICA

¶2. (C) Morin began the meeting by proclaiming his personal admiration for the U.S. and its people, praising in particular America's optimism, vision and modernity. He affirmed that he had never shared the "anti-American" sentiments that were both exploited and promoted by Chirac for political gain. Morin said he is looking forward to his upcoming visit to the U.S. at the end of the month, in which he is scheduled to meet with Secretaries Gates and Rice, NSA Hadley and selected U.S. Senators. Morin said he looks forward to continuing the "fruitful" exchanges he has had with SecDef Gates on issues ranging from NATO to missile defense. He requested additional consultations, on both a military and strategic-level, on U.S. plans for missile defense in Europe. The Ambassador informed him that General Obering from the Missile Defense Agency would shortly be in Paris to continue our dialogue with the GOF on the broad missile defense issues. Morin and his staff said that he did not have a major public speech planned for his U.S. visit, but expected that there would be press opportunities associated with some of his high-level meetings.

AFGHANISTAN: FRENCH ENGAGED BUT STABILITY LAGS

¶3. (C) Morin, who has traveled a couple of times to Afghanistan, praised ISAF Commander General McNeil as being "very good, very capable" although somewhat "optimistic" about ISAF's capacity to control the theater of operations. Morin acknowledged that the situation in Afghanistan had improved in certain zones, but said that a gap continued to exist between the military's capability to win a battle and the follow-on efforts to maintain security and stabilize the country. Morin stated that France is "more and more engaged" in Afghanistan, but he cautioned that French military forces were feeling over-stretched.

THE ARGUMENT FOR A STRONGER EUROPEAN DEFENSE

14. (C) Morin argued for the USG to "open the door" to its European partners to play a stronger role in defense matters "along side NATO." He emphasized that strengthening European defense would not undercut NATO and hoped that the Bucharest summit could confirm steps in this direction. That said, he noted that discussion of European defense was progressing slowly among European partners, largely due to the concerns of the United Kingdom that any debate on a "stronger Europe" could stir up domestic resistance to the Lisbon treaty, which all EU member states hope to ratify this year. The UK resistance is effectually blocking other partners from engaging in a deeper discussion on this issue.

15. (C) The DCM raised USG interest in learning more about a proposed EU planning cell and Morin promised to provide an outline of current GOF thoughts, noting that it would not duplicate NATO's planning operations. Morin said the EU needed such a cell to run operations that NATO would not expect to undertake, such as the EU mission in Chad. NATO would continue to provide defense against global threats. Morin stated his belief that an EU planning cell would be helpful to the U.S. as well and he expected that the current cell would only need to be bolstered up to 150 people to fulfill an independent planning purpose.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE EXPECTED DEFENSE WHITE PAPER

16. (C) The Ambassador inquired about the status of the
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defense and security "white paper" which is meant to determine future priorities in the areas of both internal and external defense. Morin said that the white paper will be the vehicle to clearly articulate broad defense policy and security priorities for France, taking into account national, European and NATO resources. He expected that, as a consequence of the white paper, the MOD could face a profound internal reform as well as a territorial reorganization of French armed forces. NATO, European defense and Missile Defense are all topics that should be addressed in the white paper, as well as proposals to improve capacity, planning and anticipation of threats. Morin said many in the MOD were concerned about the possible budgetary impact. Morin hoped that the white paper should be published by the end of March or the end of April at the latest.

MIDDLE EAST/KOSOVO

17. (C) Morin noted the recent "successful" visit of President Sarkozy to the Gulf region, highlighting the announcement that France would be opening a permanent base in Abu Dhabi. He said that it would not only provide strategic defense in the region, but that by opening the base in the United Arab Emirates, France was supporting a Muslim country with a modern vision. He also mentioned that the government of Spain wants to delay any announcement of independence by Kosovo, as it is concerned that a UDI in Kosovo will negatively affect Spanish elections (planned for March 9). Such a delay would also avoid impacting the Serbian elections in February.
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